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THE MEANING OF NEUTRALITY

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The subject of American neutrality and the European war is one intimately and vitally connected with the history and policy of the United States. One hundred and twenty-two years ago, or less than five years after the federal constitution was established, the government of the United States was required to make a momentous decision. The wars growing out of the French Revolution were well under way and the circle of conflict had just been rounded out by the entrance of the power which then held and has since continued to hold the world's naval supremacy.

Those who speak in awe-struck whispers of the problems, grave though they be, that confront us today, perhaps are not always acquainted with the appalling uncertainties and awful responsibilities that rested upon the statesmen of an earlier day, who furnished us with the chart and compass by which we have since sailed. Regarding Europe as having a set of primary interests in which the United States, with its geographical and political detachment, had no direct concern, the administration of Washington announced to the world that the United States would pursue a neutral course. The history of American diplomacy during the twenty-two years that followed, down to the close of the Napoleonic wars, is chiefly concerned with the efforts of the United States to perform the duties and maintain the rights appertaining to it as an independent and neutral nation. This period of storm and stress has well been denominated the struggle for neutrality, and in it were formulated the fundamental principles on which the modern system of neutrality is based. In the task of formulation, the chief part was borne by Thomas Jefferson, whose philosophic discernment, keen intelligence, and extended learning enabled him to give to his work a peculiar logical and original character. What we call neutrality

¹ Remarks as presiding officer at the third session of the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, held in Philadelphia on April 30 and May 1, 1915.

is a system of conduct regulated, not by the emotions nor by individual conceptions of propriety, but by certain well defined rules, and it is synonymous with impartiality only in the sense that those rules are to be enforced with impartial rigor upon all belligerents.

It is proper to advert to the fact that, during the war that is now going on in Europe, various neutral nations have issued embargoes under which the exportation of various articles is forbidden. These are commonly interpreted, I think erroneously, as "neutrality proclamations." In reality they are essentially regulations of a domestic nature, employed for the purpose of preserving a proper supply of articles, including even arms and munitions of war, in the countries concerned.